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LIVE PROJECT LOVE

Building a Framework for Live Projects

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Introduction

Live projects exist between the two tectonic plates of learning in academia and in practice. This chapter aims to frame live projects more clearly in order to encapsulate, critique, progress, and elevate the work. Ultimately it aims to share the live project love.

This text draws on a range of current publications on Live projects, in particular papers presented at the International Symposium, *Architecture 'Live Projects' Pedagogy*, May 2012ⁱ and the author's own teaching experienceⁱⁱ. At that event, a wide range of live projects were presented: design/build projects, making projects, community engagement, participation, 'incremental development' (Denicke-Pilcher and Khonsari, 2012), protest, analysis and research projects. But whilst the breadth of Live Projects is wide, we still seem unable to locate Live Projects within a pedagogical context, tending instead to limit descriptions and hence analysis to the architectural process and outcome.

So this chapter aims is to contribute to the process of creating an operational and theoretical framework for this mode of pedagogy.

It is important to recognise that architectural pedagogy, even in the form of live projects, is not architectural practice: though it frequently overlaps. Even though live projects may come very close to architectural practice, particularly at postgraduate level, they still remain a pedagogical tool. And whilst they may be 'live', unpredictable, contingent and even 'student-

led', they are still a pedagogical construct of higher education.

We need an overarching framework that goes beyond collating descriptions of project A, B or C, and instead, suggests coherent and crafted pedagogies.

To build that pedagogical framework around Live Projects we need to the component parts of a conceptual framework: a working definition, categorised exemplars, and analysis of content and method, that are specific, though not necessarily exclusive, to the concept.

Working Definition and Back Catalogue

Even a cursory glance at a selection of definitions for live projects shows that this first level of building a framework is relatively evolved. Below are two such definitions: an early and more recent attempt to encapsulate Live Projectsⁱⁱⁱ:

The live project is defined here as a type of design project that is distinct from a typical studio project in its engagement of real clients or users, in real-time settings. Students are taken out of the studio setting, and repositioned in the 'real-world'....

Sara, 2004

A live project comprises the negotiation of a brief, timescale, budget and product between a client and an educational institution.

Anderson and Priest, 2012

Between these two definitions one sees a development from describing the activity to including the context. Anderson and Priest's definition places the 'educational institution' for the first time into the definition, providing us with the means to sift and sort case studies, beginning a process of classification through which a community and lineage can emerge.

Combining the recent UK body of work that has emerged from sustained live project programmes at UK Universities such as Sheffield, London Metropolitan, Portsmouth and Queen's Belfast (and previously Cardiff and Dundee in the 80's and 90's^{iv}); with the vibrant Design/Build culture that occurs in the USA and other countries^v, we are starting to build a comprehensive catalogue where work can be cross referenced, and patterns and concerns identified. The 'Live Projects Network'^{vi}, and indeed this publication, provide further vehicles to extend the catalogue; reveal characteristics and traits, and allow those involved in architectural education to critically contextualise and develop their own individual live project pedagogies.

Considering Content

Most constructed forms of teaching/ learning start with the question, what do we want (students) to learn? Live projects expand that to ask, what more do we want architecture students to learn? Tutors create live projects, sometimes instinctively, in response to perceived gaps in education or areas of practice that normative design studios fail to address. Several such areas emerge:

People. Live projects are used to expose students to a wide variety of people implicated in architectural processes i.e. other professions, contractors, client bodies and user groups, particularly those outside the architect's normal sphere^{vii}

Processes. Live projects offer students opportunities to participate in stages around and beyond the design phase: defining briefs, fundraising, costing projects and developing marketing strategies.

Materials / Construction. Design/Build live projects allow students to directly interact with materials and the process of assembly. The argument is made that students gain not only knowledge but also knowhow^{viii} that later informs their development and practice as an architect.

Other Skills Long lists of skills are identified as emerging from live projects. As the range of live projects has increased so too does the list of skills that emerge from them. Typically skills such as group work, audience-responsive communication skills, reporting and negotiation are listed but increasingly other skills such as marketing, dealing with contingency, social media promotion etc have become part of live projects.

Value Systems: Live Projects release students from the less-than transparent values that exist in the design studio^{ix}. The question of who has the authority to judge architecture, where and when, frequently emerges for discussion, though rarely for resolution^x. Knowing that there are conflicting and contentious views of architecture is valuable for students as they begin to define and triangulate their own position. Conflictual voices can of course emerge in design studio and lectures but often they are understood as divisive or distracting to the task rather than part of the context. The value and nature of architectural practice itself also comes under scrutiny in live projects. Live projects provide a place from which students can explore 'new ways of practicing architecture and... rethink the traditional role of the architect as a service provider...' (Denicke-Pilcher and Khonsari, 2012, p3)

As live projects address this 'missing' content in architectural education they have the potential to expand and transform the knowledge, skills and values available to students of architecture and eventually the profession itself.

Considering Method

Whilst the pedagogical content of live projects is becoming clearer. The methods used has to

be 'extracted' from writings on the subject. In the international symposium people talked extensively about why and what but few outlined how. Fewer still adopted the language of learning intentions, outcomes, assessment means and criteria. And whilst the use of such terminology does not directly imply meaningful learning, we do need to capture and understand its pedagogical methodologies and structures in order to refine. Three areas emerge from the writing on live projects as places to begin that process.

Support: Those involved in delivering live projects naturally evolve systems and processes that support the process over time. They do so not just in regard to students but, significantly, also in support of clients. Support comes in various forms. In some cases, tutors select projects, prepare the ground and manage the process to varying degrees, in order to ensure positive outcomes^{xi}. In other cases, students select or bring projects themselves, increasing their understanding, ownership and commitment from the beginning^{xii}. Handbooks, 'resource and survival packs' are generated (Chiles and Till, 2009) and 'live project offices' have been established to support live projects before, during and after the process^{xiii}. This is considerably more support than any orthodox design studio requires, but then live projects bring a range of benefits that few design studios deliver.

Timing: Probably the greatest area of discussion for live project practitioners is timing and location in the curriculum. Many argue that Design/ Build projects do not fit easily into semester structures unless heavily choreographed^{xiv}. Some design tutors overcome this disjuncture by (half) placing them outside the taught curriculum^{xv}. The expectation is that the further up the curriculum one progresses the longer live projects become; like mini, 'lite' versions of practice. In fact some argue that live projects have no place at undergraduate level. However if we return to the evolving definition of live projects and particularly Anderson and Priest's definition, we see that the institution

and, by association, its operational context is part of the live project framework. In other words, higher education is as much the context for live projects as the world beyond. Creative practitioners of live project pedagogy must surely be sufficiently skilled to work within both arenas. Indeed, Anderson and Priest formulate their definition from the context of their own experience of introducing live projects into first year undergraduate courses. Hence, they are responding to a more 'present' set of pedagogical demands than architectural. My own teaching crosses similar territories, running one week live projects that involve teams of post and undergraduate students. Short projects offer undergraduate students an introduction to architectural practice without being overwhelming; and the pace of a one week live project brings out authentic, unrestricted responses. Students learn that making fast decisions allows design ideas to progress, be tested and improved, sometimes more effectively than slower, apparently more thoughtful design processes.

Critique: Given that the 'crit' plays such a central role in the culture of architectural education it is odd that discussion about assessment and critique is noticeably scarce in the writings around live projects. Where assessment is discussed, it is in the context of keeping it to a minimum (MacLaren, 2012, p7) or looking for opportunities to evaluate the outcomes of live projects in other areas of the course^{xvi}. In general the area of assessment and critique feels uncertain and as yet unresolved. Chiles and Till's description of a final presentation of live projects echo this uncertainty. These, they say, 'are not critiques but formal presentations run by the student body'. They admit that students still feel that tutors sometimes 'bring more traditional power relationships back into the review.' (Chiles and Till, 2009, p5). Like Sheffield and other places, our instincts in running the one week 'Street Society' live project at Queen's Belfast have lead us to assess the learning from live projects elsewhere in the curriculum. The live project is purposefully NOT concluded by a crit, but rather a public celebration. It is transformed into an open, cultural event rather

than the in-house, closed critique that exists in the design studio.

Perhaps in this aspect live projects ask us for a clearer theoretical and practical understanding of the differences between *assessment*, *valorization* and *critique*; and more particularly their role, timing and significance in developing and sustaining students' creative practice^{xvii}.

Conclusions

Live projects are increasing in number and sophistication and with that the formation of a defining and supporting framework is almost inevitable. There are certainly areas within their content, method and critique that require further examination. One area that has yet to be explicitly considered is the nature of the relationship between Design Studio projects and Live Projects. Certainly during the course of the International symposium there were examples of learning given that could equally have arisen within the context of the Design Studio. So let's clarify one context against the other.

Design Studio provides the perfect risk-free environment to strip away context, conditions, uncontrollable complexities and allow an abstracted space in which to examine concepts in detail and isolation; judging and testing fragments and constellations in controlled conditions with targeted skills and specific knowledges.

If live projects are take up a different role to design studio projects they can only exist in complex, unpredictable spaces where skills of negotiation, fleetness of foot, resourcefulness, time management and ability to deliver within (changing) constraints to a range of audiences are the things to be developed and most prized. And if that is the case then Live Projects must be differently assessed to design studio projects. This might naturally lead to different types of learners being valued in different ways at different times in the curriculum and ultimately result in a mark sheet whose profile is in flux! Perhaps one measure of the success of a curriculum that

integrates both live projects and design studio projects is that more people are able to find a valued position in the board church of architectural education.

Overall it seems that live projects exist between the two tectonic plates of learning in academia and practice in society. There are clear tensions, attempts at repositioning and occasional ruptures, but there is also a heightened potential for new energies and rich deposits. But we still need to frame, test and question them in order to share the live project love...

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ⁱ The International Symposium, *Architecture 'Live Projects' Pedagogy* was held May 2012 at Oxford Brookes University, England, UK.

ⁱⁱ Morrow contributed a key-note lecture, 'Live Project Love' at the International Symposium *Architecture 'Live Projects' Pedagogy* drawing on pedagogy outlined in the following publications:
Morrow, R (2007) 'Building Clouds Drifting Walls: Architectural Pedagogy'. In *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics And Poetics of Space*, Edited by Doina Petrescu, Routledge
- (2007) 'Creative Transformations'. In *Design Studio Pedagogy: horizons for the Future*. Edited by Ashraf Salama and Nicolas Wilkinson, The Urban International Press
- with James Brown. (2011) 'Street Society: A Live Project at Queen's University Belfast'. In Beacock, Makstutis and Mull (eds) *Intercultural interaction in Architectural Education*. ASD Projects, London Metropolitan University, London,
- with James Brown. (2012) 'Live Projects as Critical Pedagogies. In Esther Charlesworth, Melanie Dodd and Fiona Harrion (eds) *Designing with People*. RMIT Training Pty Ltd.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Other definitions: Watt and Cottrell, 2006 and Chiles and Holder, 2008 (see references)
- ^{iv} Under the leadership of Bob Fowles (University of Cardiff) and Bill Pirnie (University of Dundee)
- ^v Countries represented at the International Symposium at Oxford Brookes included: United States, Indonesia, Canada, Doha, India.
- ^{vi} Live Projects Network, an online resource to connect academics, students and clients involved in live projects. www.liveprojectsnetwork.org, launched by Oxford Brookes University, UK
- ^{vii} For example, see Y. Andri Yatmo, P. Atmodiwirjo. Understanding the Structure of Community and the Nature of Intervention: Lessons Learned From Community Live Projects in a Developing Country. Paper presented at Live Project's Pedagogy International Symposium, Oxford Brookes, England.
- ^{viii} For Judy Wajcman 'knowhow' is a form of knowledge that is 'visual, even tactile, rather than simply verbal or mathematical.' See J. Wajcman. *Feminism Confronts Technology*. Cambridge: Polity, 1991.
- ^{ix} This issue is well discussed in feminist critiques of Architectural Education, particularly, Dutton, T A (1991) The Hidden Curriculum and the Design Studio. In Dutton, T A (ed) *Voices in Architectural Education: cultural politics and pedagogy*, New York: Bergin and Garvey
- ^x Tonia Carless' Paper *Open School*, presented at The International Symposium, *Architecture 'Live Projects' Pedagogy*, describes a project where children and primary school teachers acting as guest critics, assess architecture student design work
- ^{xi} Michael Hughes honest critique in *Constructing a Contingent Pedagogy at Full Scale*, Paper presented at The International Symposium, *Architecture 'Live Projects' Pedagogy*, outlines the lengths faculty go to 'artificially curtail' and manage a design/build project into a form of choreographed reality in order to 'increase the likelihood of an on-time project completion'.
- ^{xii} In 'Street Society', an annual constellation of live projects run at Queen's University Belfast, a call for project proposals is announced and then shortlisted by post-graduate students who act as project managers. See R. Morrow, J. Brown. 'Street Society: a live project at Queen's University Belfast'. In Mull, R. (ed.). *Intercultural Interaction: Engaging in Architectural Education*. London: London Metropolitan University, p. 11. (2011)
- ^{xiii} For example: The Bureau of Design Research (BDR) in School of Architecture at the University of Sheffield; ASD Project Office at London Met; the Project Office at Portsmouth School of Architecture; and more generally initiatives such as the Science Shop) part of an EU-wide network) at Queen's University Belfast.
- ^{xiv} This point was made in Alan Chandler's paper '*Building is a Verb*' and Michael Hughes' paper, '*Constructing a Contingent Pedagogy at Full Scale*', International Symposium: *Architecture 'Live Projects' Pedagogy*.
- ^{xv} Denicke-Polcher & Khonsari's paper: *Architecture of Multiple Authorship*, presented at Live Project's Pedagogy International Symposium, Oxford Brookes, England, advocates live projects that start within the semester structure of a taught course but span into vacation and/or the year out i.e. the year required to satisfy Prof Examination (RIBA/ARB Part 3)
- ^{xvi} For example: Shechter's paper, *Co-Designing Speaker's Corner*, presented at The International Symposium, *Architecture 'Live Projects' Pedagogy*, describes how a learning log is used to capture and assess students' experiences, particularly in respect to evidence of collaborative skills.
- ^{xvii} Critical feedback tends towards the negative. The term 'valorization' reminds us that one of the most supportive strategies in the development of a clear and distinctive form of creative practice is to remind students (and ourselves) when things are going well.